

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**COLONEL
CHARLES W. NORTON**

Inducted April 2011



COL Charles W. Norton enlisted in the Army in 1944 and was assigned to the Persian Gulf Command (Iran) where he earned his commission. After the war, he returned to Maine, working with the National Guard, before volunteering for airborne and then a newly created organization - Special Forces.

He completed training as the honor graduate in the second class and was part of the nucleus of 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) (10th SFG(A)) which moved to Bad Toelz, Germany. Volunteering for service in Korea, he was one of approximately 50 SF personnel deployed to the 8240th Army Unit, the only unit active in unconventional warfare operations at the time. Norton was assigned to the UN Partisan Infantry Forces - Korea (UNPIFK), a guerilla force, consisting of displaced North Koreans responsible for conducting coastal raiding and intelligence gathering operations; sabotage of enemy lines of communication; recovering UN personnel; and hit-and-run missions.

Norton's post-Korea assignments included service with the 77th SFG(A); as a detachment commander in the 10th SFG(A) under Col. Aaron Bank; and as an instructor on intelligence gathering techniques at the UW Department, U.S. Army Special Warfare School. In 1962-63, CPT Norton, assigned to 1st SFG(A), was made the first full-tour commander of the resident SF Detachment in Korea. He was instrumental in assisting the Korean Army in developing its burgeoning special-operations capabilities and standing up a Special Forces type unit.

In 1965, following a tour with 1st Armored Division, Norton returned to Special Forces, deployed to the Republic of Vietnam, and was assigned to the Studies and Observation Group (SOG) as commander of Forward Operating Base (FOB) 2, replacing MAJ Larry Thorne who had been lost as part of a reconnaissance team (RT). Norton expanded the program, establishing two FOBs at Khe Sanh and Dak To and further strengthening structure and support mechanisms required for successful cross-border reconnaissance programs. Often serving as both operations and launch officer as well as on scene commander for most insertions and recoveries, he directed the equipping, training, briefing, deployment and recovery of multiple RTs, flying daily with one or more Forward Air Controller (FAC) reconnaissance flights, maintaining radio contact with deployed RTs. He, upon seeing enemy activity unseen by RTs on the ground, frequently found himself directing RTs to exfiltration sites simultaneous to coordinating complex fire missions by RVNAF, US Army and USAF aircraft in order to cover the extractions. During his last months as FOB commander, before assuming duties as XO for Command Control Central (CCC), he built up Kontom's support facilities, including barracks, mess hall, and dispensary.

Norton returned stateside, attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, with a follow-on assignment as the sole instructor in UW and airborne operations at the Armed Forces Staff College. During this time, he also attended Park College, graduating magna cum laude. In 1969, returning to Vietnam, he served first as the executive officer of the 5th SFG(A), and later as an infantry battalion commander to the 14th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division.

After his tour in Vietnam, Norton was made the UW Branch Chief, and, later the Special Operations Division chief to the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, representing the Army staff on significant joint actions pertaining to special operations. After a course in the Finnish language, he was assigned as the Army attaché in Finland before returning to Fort Bragg as commander of the 7th SFG(A). He then assumed the position as deputy commander of the U.S. Army JFK Center for Military Assistance (now the U.S. Army Special Operations Command). In that position, he ensured the maintenance of 7th SFG(A) as an active group. He also actively revived the historical connection with the First Special Service Force (FSSF), a joint U.S.-Canadian commando World War II unit which provides SF its lineage as well as their regimental insignia. FTX Maple Leaf, done in concert with the Canadian Army in 1979, evolved into Menton Day, an annual celebration held alternately each December in the United States and Petawawa, Canada.

Retiring in 1981, Norton, in his short speech said, "Thirty-five years ... Was it worth it? . . . Hell, yes!" He continued his association with Special Forces as a member, later president, and now as president emeritus of the Special Forces Association Chapter XI, in Washington, DC. He established procedures ensuring all interments of Special Forces (active-duty, retired, officer or enlisted) at Arlington National Cemetery are attended by chapter members. Additionally, he serves as liaison with the First Special Service Force Association, attending their annual reunions. During the late 80s and 90s, Norton assisted the Finnish government and the Joint Recovery Task Force to find MAJ Larry Thorne's remains. Successful, the task force found bone fragments from the crash site in 1999 which analysis would prove to belong to Thorne. MAJ Larry Thorne's remains were interred in Arlington National Cemetery in 2003.

Norton's awards and decorations include the Combat Infantryman's Badge, three Legions of Merit, two Bronze Star Medals, one Bronze Star Medal with valor device, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, seven Air Medals, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with gold and silver stars, the Army General Staff Identification Badge, the Excellence in Competition Badge (rifle), the Good Conduct Medal (three awards), the Order of the Knights of the Finnish White, the U.S. Army Parachutist Badge and 11 service medals.